



# Department of Commerce

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## Farms to Food Banks Pilot Program

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Report on Activities and Program Data (2SSB 6483, Laws of 2008)

**December 2009**

Report to the Legislature  
Rogers Weed, Director

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## OVERVIEW

The Farms to Food Banks Pilot Program was created as a part of the Local Farms – Healthy Kids Act (Second Substitute Senate Bill 6483, Laws of 2008). The program was designed to provide funds for the food bank system in specific pilot communities. Funds were designated for contracts with local farmers to provide fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat products for distribution to low-income people at designated food banks. The Legislature appropriated \$350,000 of general funds in 2009 to initiate the pilot program. Funds were not appropriated in 2010 so the pilot lapsed before the second year began. Second Substitute Senate Bill 6483 would have expired a year later on July 1, 2010 if funds were available for the second year.

The Local Farms – Healthy Kids Act required the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) to report on this program's activities and data related to the program to the Legislature biennially. This report also provides information on local plans to maintain food producer relationships developed by this pilot program locally even though state funding was eliminated during the second year of the Farms to Food Banks Program.

More information on Farms to Food Bank Program farm producers, participating food banks, contractor reports, and contractor purchasing models are available online at <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/1156/default.aspx>.

## Conclusion

In one growing season Farms to Food Banks Program contractors were able to test a variety of approaches to meet the Legislature's request to contract with local farmers to provide fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat products to low-income people at food banks. Four contractors used a variety of different cost effective methods of buying from local food producers. In less than two years, contractors established new relationships between food banks and food producers throughout the state, most of whom had not previously worked together. Many food producers plan to donate products to food banks they established relationships with as a result of this program.

*"This pilot helped us solidify relationships with regional producers and increase their awareness of the need for food assistance in the region, opening the door for donations in the future"*

–Second Harvest Inland Northwest

The Farms to Food Banks Program purchased 530,860 pounds of fruit, vegetables, dairy, eggs, and meat produced in Washington for distribution by more than 80 food banks. Nearly 300,000 households received those products at a time when Washington's food banks are experiencing the highest demand in the state's history.

## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND DATA

The Emergency Food Assistance Program at Commerce oversaw the development of the Farms to Food Banks Program because Emergency Food Assistance works closely with food banks and distributors across the state. Commerce hired a part-time employee to coordinate the development and implementation of Farms to Food Banks Program. The Farms to Food Banks Program Coordinator established an advisory committee to guide development of a request for proposals, a scope of work, and the selection of Farms to Food Banks contractors that met the legislature's requirements in the Local Farms – Healthy Kids Act.

The Farms to Food Banks Program required Commerce to publish a request for proposals to select pilot sites to contract with local farmers and meet other requirements. The request for proposals required bidders to provide letters of intent from food producers. Bonus points were awarded to proposals that planned to buy from local farms (defined as farms in the same county or in counties adjacent to bidder organizations). Commerce received 14 proposals from food banks, food distribution organizations, Community Action Agencies, and other nonprofit organizations.

The Legislature also provided specific direction for the number and types of communities who would receive contracts in 2SSB 6483 (Laws of 2008):

- Select no more than five projects to fund statewide through a competitive process
- Choose at least one project in an urban area that is negatively impacted by a mass transit infrastructure problem, ethnically diverse, and has a city in it with a population of 500,000 or greater
- Choose at least one project east of the crest of the Cascades
- Choose at least one project in a rural county



*Norm grew vegetables on his five acre farm near Stevenson for Washington Gorge Action Programs.*

### Farms to Food Bank Program Contractors and Contract Amounts

Commerce awarded contracts to four social service organizations whose applications were the most competitive based on the Legislature's requirements.

- **Food Lifeline**, Seattle (Representing an urban area in an ethnically diverse city with 500,000 or more population) Contract Amount: \$64,890
- **Bellingham Food Bank**, Whatcom County (Serving a rural county) Contract Amount: \$53, 157 in 2008<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bellingham Food Bank will receive funds to continue elements of their Farms to Food Banks practices from the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

- **Washington Gorge Action Programs**, Skamania/Klickitat Counties (Serving rural counties east of the Cascades)  
Contract Amount: \$92,678
- **Second Harvest Inland Northwest** (Serving rural counties in eastern Washington and urban Spokane County)  
Contract Amount: \$76,095

## Local Program Implementation

Contractors developed different strategies to develop partnerships with producers based on what products were available locally and what food banks found were the high priority nutritious food needs of their clients. Each contractor provided Commerce with a summary report of their results. This section contains highlights of implementation practices and lessons learned that contractors reported. Complete contractor reports, including brief descriptions of each food producer, are available online at <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/1156/default.aspx>.



*Jeff and Karen grow fruits and vegetables at J&K Growers in Dallesport, Washington.*

## Food Lifeline: Serving Seattle

Seattle's Food Lifeline created a list of products that they hoped to purchase from food producers and compared that list to harvest information their producers provided. That practice ensured that farms generally knew what Food Lifeline and their food banks needed, and provided Food Lifeline with an idea of when desired products would be available. The lists also helped limit products that their food banks did not need or had available from other sources.

Food Lifeline found that disclosing the amount of money available to a producer helped food providers maximize the quantity of food each provider sold to them. For example, some producers were not willing to negotiate a lower price per case or bunch, but were willing to add additional products to an order when surpluses were available, reducing the cost of the case or bunch.

## Bellingham Food Bank: Serving Whatcom County

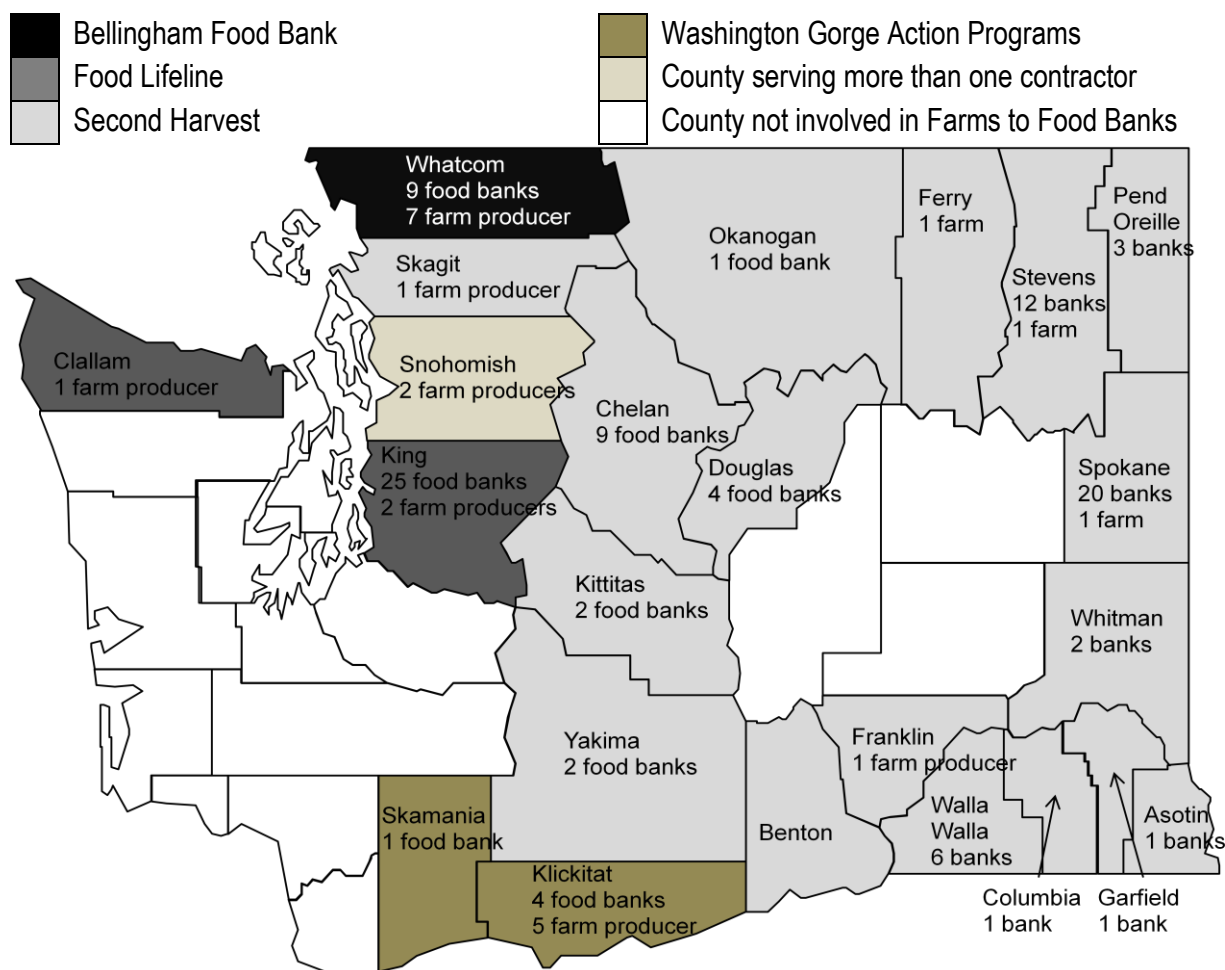
Bellingham Food Bank focused on purchasing milk, eggs, and produce with their grant because those products were requested by the clients of the nine food banks they served. Bellingham Food Bank clients commented that food from Farms to Food Banks grant allowed households to stretch discretionary income further, and was the first locally grown food they had eaten in recent memory. In the future they plan to contract with farms to grow more produce like cabbage and tomatoes that is not available from other sources. Bellingham reported that the Farms to Food Banks Program helped them establish relationships with farms that they had never donated to

food banks in the past. They anticipate that some of those farms will donate to food banks now as a result of this program.

### Washington Gorge Action Programs: Serving Skamania and Klickitat Counties

Washington Gorge Action Programs developed a network of providers and food banks east of the Cascades. Washington Gorge Action Programs took different approaches with their producers based on the producer's experience. Since Dickey Farms has been around for years, Washington Gorge Action Programs negotiated purchases based on Dickey's wholesale rate with additional discounts on produce that was considered 'seconds'. Washington Gorge Action Programs also worked with three smaller, newer farms to help them determine the grower's costs to ensure that the Farms to Food Banks funds were supporting the higher costs of a smaller farm. This contractor intended, and was successful, at balancing purchasing products at good prices while supporting a variety of different sized farms in their area.

### Counties Involved in the Farm to Food Banks Program



Source: Washington State Department of Commerce Farms to Food Banks Contractor Reports

## **Second Harvest Inland Northwest: Supporting Food Banks East of the Cascades**

Second Harvest Inland Northwest was able to focus a significant portion of their grant on bulk items because their infrastructure supports repackaging and distributing bulk deliveries. Second Harvest has volunteers who were already trained to sort, repack, and distribute products in a way that each of their 43 food banks can distribute to households. The bulk purchases allowed Second Harvest to stretch grant dollars further.

The Farms to Food Banks Program resulted in Second Harvest Inland Northwest finding a new source for eggs. In 2007 Wilcox Farms closed, which had been a primary source for eggs and dairy for their food banks. Second Harvest also indicated that this program led to developing relationships with Darigold and National Food Corporation which Second Harvest hopes will continue to donate food now that they have a working relationship.

## **Food Producers: Small, Local, and New to Food Banks**

More than half of the food purchased by Farms to Food Banks came from local small family farms in the contractor's home county or an adjoining county. For the purposes of this report, small family farms are owned by family members and farms with under \$250,000 in gross annual sales. Most Farms to Food Banks producers, 15 of 21, fit that small family farm definition. The majority of food producers were first-time customers of the contractors. Contractors reported that many new donor relationships developed through this program even though Farms to Food Banks ended earlier than expected.

## **Program Pricing Per Pound**

Each producer was required to provide their methods for setting prices to Commerce so that reasonable pricing could be ensured. All of the contractors based their purchase strategies on discussions with local food banks. Food banks provided contractors with high priority nutritious food needs. Contractor purchases were also influenced by what food was available locally and at what time. Some contractors were unable to purchase some foods they had ordered from producers because they assumed the program's second year would be funded.

## **Pounds of Food, Households Served, Food Banks Involved**

Contractor	Pounds Food Purchased	Cost of Food Purchased	Avg. Price/lb. of Food	Households Receiving Food	Food Banks Served
Food Lifeline	61,800	\$44,948	\$ .73/lb.	68,000	25
Second Harvest Inland Northwest	339,278	\$73,025	\$ .22/lb.	52,939	43
Washington Gorge Action Programs	64,806	\$60,734	\$ .94/lb.	18,290	5
Bellingham Food Bank	64,974	\$49,857	\$ .77/lb.	154,905	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>530,858</b>	<b>\$228,564</b>	<b>\$ .43/lb.</b>	<b>294,313</b>	<b>82</b>

Second Harvest Inland Northwest achieved a much lower price per pound than other contractors. They purchased products from larger producers with lower costs, and bought lower price per pound produce than other contractors. Three of four contractors chose to purchase from smaller farms that sold organically grown products, which were generally more expensive than the same conventionally grown products. Overall, the Farms to Food Banks Program purchased products for an average of \$.43 per pound.

## **Future Efforts to Link Washington Food Producers with Food Banks**

Specific funding for the Farms to Food Banks Program was eliminated in the 2009-11 Operating Budget. In response, contracts were terminated before the program could be completed and the program coordinator position at Commerce was eliminated.

Some legislators and food bank stakeholders asked Commerce to consider ways to continue successful elements of the program. The 2009-11 Operating Budget increased funds for the Emergency Food Assistance Program by \$1 million for the provision of highly nutritious foods for food banks in response to the increase in food bank demand during fiscal year 2009.

In response to those requests, Commerce met with Farms to Food Banks Program contractors, representatives of the Emergency Food Assistance advisory group, and the Washington Food Coalition. Bellingham Food Bank asked to continue purchasing food from local farmers at a reduced funding level of \$20,000 for each year of the 2009-11 Biennium (down from \$53,157 in the first year of the Farms to Food Banks Program). The group recommended that the additional Emergency Food Assistance appropriation support Bellingham's efforts. Commerce supported the recommendation because it met the 2009 Legislative intent to purchase highly nutritious foods for food banks with the additional appropriation. The Washington Food Coalition leadership endorsed this plan and encouraged their members to consider incorporating Farms to Food Banks Program practices with the additional funding they would be receiving through the 2009 appropriation.



### Program Contractors, Service Areas, Farm Producers, and Products Purchased

Food Lifeline	King (Seattle only)	Full Circle Farm	Beets, Bok Choy, Lettuce, Greens
		Oxbow Farm	CSA Boxes (mixed products)
		Willie Greens	Radishes, Turnips, Bok Choy
		Nash's Organics	Carrots, Beets, Kale, Chard, Lettuce, Parsley
Second Harvest Inland Northwest	Spokane, Douglas, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Whitman, Yakima, Kittitas, Stevens, Okanogan, Benton, Franklin, Yakima, Walla Walla, Ferry, Pend Oreille, Chelan	Darigold Dairy	Milk
		Echo Valley Farms	Potatoes
		National Food Corp.	Eggs
		Skagit Valley Best Produce	Potatoes
Washington Gorge Action Programs	Klickitat/Skamania	Forge Creek Farms	Carrots, Broccoli, Squash
		Heard Farm	Squash, Carrots
		Oakdell Egg Farms	Eggs
		Draper Farm	Chicken
		Organic Valley Farms	Milk, Butter
		Dickey Farms	Cucumbers, Cabbage, Eggplant, Spinach, Green Onions, Tomatoes, Green Beans, Peppers, Peaches, Zucchini, Corn
		J&K Growers	Chard, Spinach, Green Beans, Bok Choy, Peas, Green Onions, Radishes, Broccoli, Kale
Bellingham Food Bank	Whatcom	Edaleen Dairy	Milk
		Dairy Distributing	Eggs
		Hopewell Farm	Cauliflower, Broccoli, Onions, Squash, Carrots,
		Nooksack Nine Farms	Cucumbers, Cabbage, Corn
		Alm Hill Garden	Asparagus, Beans, Cauliflower, Cucumbers, Leeks, Peas, Peppers Potatoes, Spinach, Tomatoes
		Broadleaf Farm	Beets, Fava Beans, Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrots

Source: Washington State Department of Commerce Farms to Food Banks Contractor Reports

Contractor reports, including descriptions of each producer, are online at <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/1156/default.aspx>.